

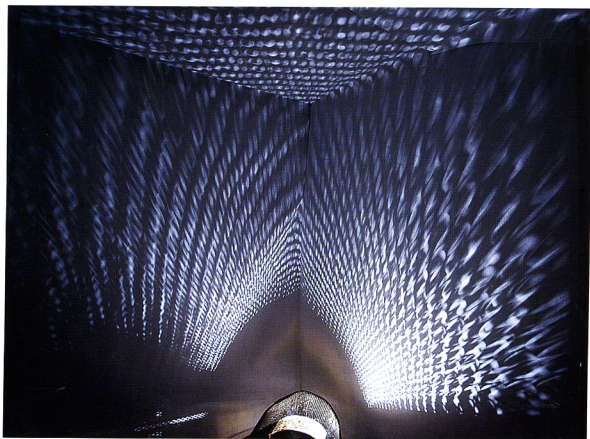
IN_SEARCH_OF_THE_GHOST_IN_THE_MACHINE

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New media theorists' writings often raise the question of how much the new media have really contributed to innovation in the forms of representation and how much the transition to the new media has simply shunted the old forms into a new format. Peter Weibel for example finds the origins of the new media in three great phenomena of the sixties – Op Art and Kinetic Art, Happenings and Fluxus, as well as in computer graphics and animation.¹

Why the need in this article to go back in time? Probably because in the attempt to understand Klif's procedures it is impossible to bypass his constant obsession with the anatomy of the media image, that is, of the deep-structure understanding of the way in which it arises so that with a yoking of old and new it can still generate hybrid situations with unexpected effects. But the rationalisation of procedures in a historical and theoretical sense is mostly absent from the artist's own explanations, for everything that he creates is the result above all of his experimental curiosity, of empiricism. In his first installations (*Lamps*, 1993–1995), nevertheless, models can be recognised in works that appear under the aegis of the New Tendencies. The materials he uses mostly recall the set of tools of the lumino-kinetic practitioners who deliberately resort to retro tools. The effects created through the operation of light and movement on found artefacts (sometimes originating in the kitchen) create sensations reminiscent of Op Art. But unlike the lumino-kinetic objects of the sixties, optical illusions are no longer bounded spaces or boxes that are mostly observed from a distance, rather they expand hypnotically through the space. But then again, Klif is no less interested in the magic of the box.

¹ Peter Weibel, *It is Forbidden Not to Touch: Some Remarks on the (Forgotten Parts of the) History of Interactivity and Virtuality*, in *MediaArtHistories*, ed. Oliver Grau, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2007, pp. 21–43



1993. *Bez naziva/Lampa*, kinetički svjetlosni objekt /
1993. *Untitled/Lamp*, kinetic light object

2001. *Bez naziva*, interaktivna video instalacija, Klovičevi dvori, Zagreb /
 2001. *Untitled*, interactive video installation, Klovičevi dvori, Zagreb

1992. *Bez naziva*, preparirani televizor /
 1992. *Untitled*, prepared television set

1999. *Bez naziva/Glova*, interaktivna instalacija, Galerija Karas, Zagreb /
 1999. *Untitled/Head*, interactive installation, Gallery Karas, Zagreb



When we refer to one more early cycle (*Prepared Television*, 1993—1997), it seems that he arrived at the processes implicit in the line of development of new media art intuitively – by looking, as he said himself, for the ghost in the machine. In the early nineties he lived in Dusseldorf, where for the first time he met the works of media art pioneer Nam June Paik. Fascinated by electronic junk since he was a secondary school boy, he soon made old televisions his primary medium. At first they were just used as little stage-boxes, which he emptied of their surplus of electronics and filled with toys, lenses, lights and simple motors that moved at the push of a control button, so as to create his own programmes in them.

With this combination of highly sophisticated and low technology, he went on with the intuitive search for the essence of media representation – the relations between perspective, the camera obscura and the screen. The box in the Renaissance functioned as a way of ordering the world into a readable order of geometrical perspective, but



2005. *Unutra/Van*, video
instalacija, Galerija PM, Zagreb /
2005. *Inside/Out*, video
installation, Gallery PM, Zagreb

the cryptic scene of the camera obscura (*Head*, 1999) into which he puts a rubber head used in the medical world for practising artificial respiration, lights the inside with bulbs, and projects it onto the wall, with an emphatic chiaroscuro and diffused contours, has more in it of the Baroque. Through the application of sensors and concealed computer technology, when the box is touched, accidentally or deliberately, something that looks dead will suddenly spring to life.

Adapting the dimensions of electronic images to the real dimensions of the space, with the interactive environmental installations that he put on in the cellars of Klovićevi dvori Gallery in 2001, he took control of the observer's perception. One of the preconditions for this to happen was the inversion of the classical assumption of representation in which an immovable observer consents to the spot dictated by the composition. In these theatrical installations, making use of a computer, video camera and sensors hidden in the space, an interactive relationship between body of observer and image is set up, and for the picture to appear at all, it is essential that the observer should move. In the continuity between body of observer and the space that surrounds it the illusion in which we meet with ourselves, or the virtual visitor (the image of whom has been left in the composition) or the artist who walks around within the composition, becomes a component part of the body of the observer. The possibilities of what can happen in the image in all three cases in the sense of different effects that come into being by the movement of the body in the space are not entirely predictable and the feeling that we are incessantly tracked by CCTV cameras is not too great a price to pay for a pleasure similar to a mild attack of vertigo.

In one detached segment of that exhibition there was a video installation that was to shift the focus of Klif's interest to simpler, texturally richer, effects, since it did not use the computer to process the image, rather, for the control of the camera, and the signal from the camera was directly linked to the video projectors.

A complex environmental installation *Inside/outside* (2005), which came next, once again confirmed Klif's impassioned search for solutions of his own. In his own way, but with the sensibility of the generation of media



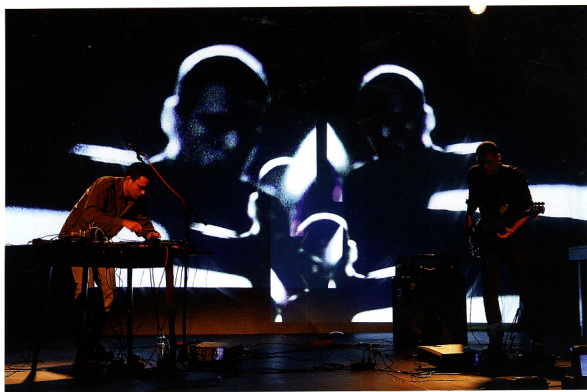
2005, *Synchronicity*,
višekanalni dvd /
2005, *Synchronicity*,
multichannel dvd

artists that came of age in the nineties. What he offers to the observer is the experience of totality, of immersion, doing away with distance, establishing the opportunity to merge with the visual medium that will affect both the sensory impressions and the consciousness.² In this environmental installation produced in the circular space of the Expanded Media Gallery, for the first time Klif used a mass of old black and white television screens, linking them with a movable camera and projectors, so as to achieve the experience of total mobilisation. Abiding in the space, the visitor cannot guess from which angle and when he is being observed and how many times he or she is going to be replicated on the multitude of projections that create a chaotic spectacle in the space, ultimately disintegrating the Cartesian illusion of homogenous space. In the work there are no additional effects, such as video mixers, nor digital processing of images – mixing of the image occurs optically, by the multiplication of pixels, the overlapping of projections that drip from the screens along the walls of the gallery covering them with dense textures of electronics. Between the reality of the physical space and that of the virtual, overpopulated with an infinity of tautological multiplications, copies of copies of reality, a continuity is established. Finding the preconditions for this continuity in what is called the mixed reality³ that arises from the linking of real and virtualised scenes is like the automation of the photocopier. In the darkened room, the attention of the visitor is not directed to the space but, as in the cinema, but is ineluctably drawn out of the real space and towards the screen.

Klif often uses similar effects of multiplication working with musicians, in audio-visual performances when changes of image occur in concert with the music. What we see on the projections is the transition and multiplication of the image of all that is already there. The performers, instruments and images of the actual technology that produces sound and image – the screens, microphones, amplifiers, networks of cables become a part of the electronic setting that is changed with an alteration of sound and rhythm. Appearances in which

² The concept of immersion which is a key issue for the understanding of the development of the media, although it is in itself contradictory and vague, is explained by Oliver Grau in the book *Virtual Art. From Illusion to Immersion*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003.

³ Ibid. (Oliver Grau, *Virtuelna umetnost*, Clio, 2008., Belgrade, tr.: Ksenija Todorović, p. 249)



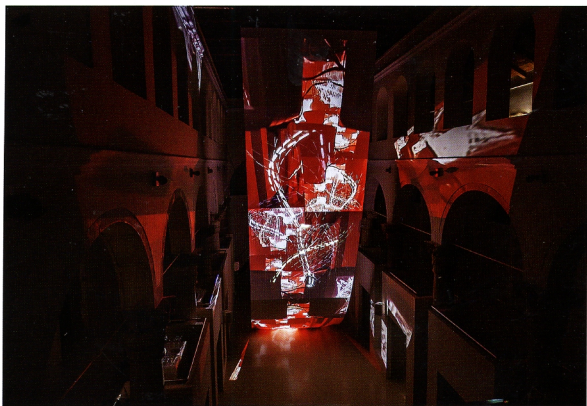
2012. 264th day of the year.
 Av performers, A. Sinkauz,
 N. Sinkauz, M. Piškulić, I. Marušić
 Klif, Pogon Jedinstvo, Zagreb /
 2012. 264th day of the year.
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 N. Sinkauz, M. Piškulić, I. Marušić
 Klif, Pogon Jedinstvo, Zagreb

by immediate participation it is possible to affect the parameters of the performance are often in Klif's centre of attention as an important part of the working process, since in these live performances he often for the first time has the chance to test out how the results that he arrives at through work in the studio actually function; if they turn out to be successful, he will later use them in his exhibition projects.

At the time when Klif's first electronic environments first appeared on the scene, alongside the opposition indy and tactical media that are founded on a radical criticism of capitalist art production, in new media theory the concept of *sovereign media* appear. These are defined as media that are "free of any kind of ideological underpinning and cut all the surviving imaginaries linked with truth, reality, representation" and offer pleasure in the very possibility of a non-pragmatic transition of information with no information.⁴ In the context of the new theory, Baudrillard's apocalyptic utterances about the media-mediated images that no longer indicate anything except to the self-referential significance of their vanished objects, instead of "melancholy without consolation because of loss of sense"; they take on Utopian connotations of "aesthetic wandering that is in itself self-sufficient, narcissistic, ecstatic and free". But Klif is not the type of artist who consciously follows styles and trends in order to fit in. His approach is both open and investigative, and in the context of what is still a fluid discipline, of what is called media art, it is not simple to follow his trajectory.

The pleasure of merging into a dense texture of the electronic landscape in which the visitor by entering the exhibition venue becomes the main subject is turned around in the very next projects. In the happening *Synchronicity* (2004), the artist is physically separated from the public, which can follow what is happening – thanks to the variously placed cameras and speakers in the space in which they congregate – on the external wall of the gallery from a number of viewpoints. Every viewpoint is different, for the same scene is shot from different angles. The fragmented images and sounds that we can guess at, but cannot always determine with total certainty how they come into being, create the suggestion of staying and watching someone's creative process. Displaying himself with a vulnerable feeling of unease and exposure, without a prior plan, the artist abandons himself to

4 Geert Lovink & Joanne Richardson, *Notes on Sovereign Media*, http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors/lovink-richardson.html
 5 Zarko Pač, *Medijsko dokinace povijesti, Jean Baudrillard i nečuvana nezvjesnost dopada*, http://www.zesveske.ba/05_07/0507_1_2.htm



2012. *Sveta Srca*, video instalacija
/ Serija Wobbulatori, Arheološki
muzej Istre, Pula /
2012. *Sveta Srca*, video installation
/ wobbulator series, Archeological
Museum of Istria, Pula

improvisation with lights, sounds, gramophone and dictaphone. The parameters are set in advance, but nothing that happens has been stage managed in advance. Instead of a neatly packaged spectacle ready for consumption, in the happening in an aesthetic close to that of Fluxus, Klif boldly opens up the view into the very process, with all the uncertainties because of the divergence between what he himself hears and sees and what the others hear and see.

In slightly later interactive audio installations *Telephoning 1* and *Telephoning 2* (2008–2010), in open processes that take place on the spot Klif tests out the psychological effects of establishing communication with respect to the categories of private and public space. In *Telephoning 1* computers in the gallery, by random selection, simultaneously call up two landline numbers from the telephone directory of citizens of the Republic of Croatia, and in a room wired for sound the visitors are offered a microphone for conversation. The three-way communications in which all conversations and calls are heard at the same time is most often conducive to a number of awkward situations because of the unannounced intrusion into someone's private space. The embarrassment is mutual, since the visitors who have found themselves in this situation start to feel a responsibility for taking over the communication established, although they have an initial advantage in that on the computer screen they can see the name of the subscriber. Indeed, this leads some of them to try to manipulate or even abuse their initial position of power. In *Telephoning 2* the situation is changed; the random calls from the gallery were addressed to public call boxes, and the passers-by could choose whether to consent to the game, either out of curiosity or some other prompting. With the sound that summons to communication, Klif creates one more experience – the call boxes with their ringing become huge sound installations, playing the score that he has composed for them.

Klif's most recent works from the *Wobulator Series* take us back to the initial question of the innovativeness of the new media. The recapitulation of the instruments that create attractive abstract pictures by the work of magnetic waves on analogue signals that were patented in the sixties by Nam June Paik and the engineer Shuga Abe, and later successfully experimented with by Steina and Woody Vasulka, is a precondition but also a prompting for the beginning of new experimental processes. The linear electronic drawings are no longer, as in the pioneering period when they came into being, bounded by screens, but are each time readjusted to the new provocations of the space. The actual abstract drawing, which takes us back to the art of the beginning of the last century, and is now created by the materialisation of electronic signals, is shifted into the real space of architecture, different every time, opening up new opportunities for manipulation.

The decision about how the vibrating electronic drawings will occupy an environment always depends on the disposition of the actual space which, a little before the opening of the exhibition, is changed into the artist's studio and becomes the live scene of a process with an outcome that is entirely unpredictable.

What is remarkable in these electronic scenes is the fact they are not produced with the computers that are today most often used to create abstract presentations in widespread use (from science to design); rather, with the mediation of the wobulator, in analogue terms. The wobulator, which functions like an oscilloscope, has no pixels, just a single point that hurtles with greater or smaller speed over the screen. If the dot moves fast enough, thanks to the inertness of the eye and the phosphorous layer on the screen, we see a line.⁶ Further changes that occur are conditioned by sound frequencies that are transmitted from the computer and "sometimes little shifts between frequencies, inaudible as they are", explains Klif, "will cause a great change in the image".

Projections become a constant field of linear transformations in the sense of density, curvature, unexpected arabesques that oscillate between order and chaos. As compared with the geometrical essentialism of early abstraction that was based on the principles of the reduction of objective reality, in an essay dedicated to computer-generated abstraction⁷, Lev Manovich indicates the essential difference, describing contemporary electronic drawings as notions of the complexity of the world that cannot be brought down to the geometrical diagram. If modern abstraction took it for granted that behind the sensory richness of the world there are simple (abstract) structures generating all this wealth, what we see in contemporary electronic abstractions are dynamic interactions that range from very simple to increasingly complex parameters. Abstraction, then, is no longer created as a result of reduction, but by the complication of simple processes, suggesting a perception of the world as a complex image in incessant change. The artist himself compares the magic that arises with the mass of items of visual information found in nature (like the effects of waves on the sea), which we receive, but cannot control, cannot decode. The only thing we can do is to immerse ourselves into the vibrant electronic textures and gives ourselves over to the experience of pleasure.

6 I.M.Klif, interview, catalogue *Task 14*, Plesni centar TALA, 19.4.2014.

7 Lev Manovich, *Abstraction and Complexity*, in *MediaArtHistories*, ed. Oliver Grau, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2007.

